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DEPT FOR EUR/NCE - WILLIAM SILKWORTH

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VISITS IASI FOR OBSERVANCE OF 65TH ANNIVERSARY OF IASI POGROM

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¶1. Summary. On June 27-29 Romania solemnly commemorated June 27-29 the 65th anniversary of the Iasi Pogrom, one of the worst events of the Holocaust in Romania. The commemoration was sponsored by the Romanian government, through the new "Elie Wiesel" Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania and the Romanian Jewish Federation. The Ambassador participated along with Foreign Minister Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, the Israeli Ambassador, and other notable figures. Speakers highlighted the important progress the Romanian government has made in recent years in instituting programs to teach the true history of the Holocaust, but expressed concern about persistent anti-Semitism and extreme nationalism in some corners of Romanian society. On the margins of the commemoration, the Ambassador met with the prefect and mayor, and announced a donation of medical equipment by USAID. End Summary.

¶2. The Ambassador attended commemorative events for the 65th anniversary of the Iasi Pogrom, one of the most violent pogroms in Jewish history. Perpetrated by Romanian security forces under the leadership of wartime dictator Ion Antonescu, the Pogrom resulted in the mass murder of at least 13,266 Jews by Romanian security forces and armed civilians. The three-day observance of the 1941 Iasi Pogrom was the largest remembrance of the event to date and was financially supported almost entirely by the Romanian government.

¶3. At the opening ceremony at Ion Cuza University in Iasi, FM Ungureanu noted the progress Romania has made recently in recognizing the true history of this tragic period. At the same time, he expressed concern about increased anti-Semitism throughout Europe. He said it was necessary to take the initiative at high levels of government to eradicate this unacceptable phenomenon. In her remarks, Israeli Ambassador Rodica Gordon saluted Romanians' desire to create a society that is well-informed and open to democracy. However, she warned against resurgent anti-Semitism and xenophobia. She took note of the prevalence of racist slogans spouted by fans in Romanian soccer stadiums and the use of fascist symbols by extreme nationalist groups, including a gay rights march in early June. The Ambassador similarly commended Romania for making progress in recognizing the true history of the Holocaust in the country, but lamented the persistence of extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic views espoused by some politicians. (Note: The entire text of the Ambassador's remarks can be seen on the Embassy website at www.usembassy.ro. End Note.)

¶4. Additional events at the Iasi observance included a wreath laying at a monument to victims of the pogrom, and a solemn march past the mass grave where victims of the pogrom were buried. After the opening ceremony, the Ambassador also

gave awards to the winners of an essay competition for high school students, sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and the Elie Wiesel Institute. The top 3 winners were given cash awards and a copy of Elie Wiesels &Night,8 which had been translated and published into Romanian with USG funding.

Prefect Discusses Investment, Roma, Bureaucracy

¶5. While In Iasi, the Ambassador also met with the prefect Radu Priscaru, the youngest in Romania. Priscaru was optimistic about prospects for the local economy, which he expected would benefit from an influx of EU investment and funding after EU accession. Priscaru also highlighted his efforts to address the pervasive poverty of ethnic Roma in or near Iasi. He cited a program to encourage Roma children to remain in school and the recent appointment by his office of a Roma coordinator for the county. He noted continued problems in the registration of Roma for birth certificates and inclusion in the census because of their historic fear of local officials and police. "The Roma don't want the government to know who they are or where they are," he asserted.

¶6. Priscaru welcomed the fact that the emphasis of the new law on prefectures was decentralization. Although the law was an improvement, prefectures still had difficulty with Ministry of Interior officials who opposed devolving power and budgetary authority to local entities. Still, Priscaru felt the situation was improving and Minister of the Interior Blaga was a supporter of greater authority and control being given to the local authorities. Priscaru advocated more training and exposure to local government institutions in Europe and the U.S.

Mayor Aims to Create New Jobs

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¶7. Opposition Social Democratic Party mayor Gheorghe Nichita told the Ambassador that he sought to create new jobs through direct investment from within Romania and from abroad. He expressed disappointment that one international firm had decided against opening a new assembly sector factory in Iasi, but noted that Siemens had located an automobile parts testing facility in Iasi after the city had provided space. The Ambassador mentioned that Iasi needed to expand its airport if it hoped to attract increased business investment. The mayor informed the ambassador that a feasibility study was planned for a 200 million Euro airport improvement project. The Ambassador also noted that the poor highway infrastructure to Iasi also inhibited growth. Mayor Nichita replied that this was a problem in all of Romania, but expressed his hope the situation would improve after EU accession.

¶8. The Ambassador also met with medical staff and students at the Infectious Disease Hospital, &Sfanta Parascheva8 (built in 1892). At an event organized by USAID, he announced the donation of a real-time PCR, specific test kits, and other equipment to quickly and accurately detect the H5N1 virus in humans. In addition, The Ambassador announced the donation of 4000 sets of personal protective equipment to Romania to respond to avian influenza.

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